

## **History of the Lemon Grove Fire Department**

### **Prior to 1925**

Fire protection in Lemon Grove prior to 1925 was practically nonexistent. Although the Forestry Service was obligated to provide this service, the lack of communication (only six phones in the entire area) usually resulted in total destruction in the case of fire. In 1925, two homes were completely destroyed by fire. The residents of Lemon Grove decided that the public's safety required formation of a local fire department. The first fire district was formed that year. The yearly operating budget of \$600.00 consisted of donations by property owners. Anyone donating \$7.50 to \$10.00 was entitled to a fire hydrant in front of their home (The hydrant consisted of a 4 inch pipe with a valve mounted on top).

### **First Engines**

After some unsuccessful experiences with firefighting equipment, the district finally purchased a Model "T" truck with hose and a pump, and a 1927 Dodge chassis on which a chemical tank was mounted. During this trial and error period the district was embarrassed when it learned that its Model "T" pumper could not power itself to the top of certain hills in Lemon Grove. This problem was solved when a used 1927 Hudson was purchased and a "pushboard" was mounted on the front. From then until the district was disbanded the Hudson responded with the Model "T" and pushed it up the inclines that were too steep for it to navigate under its own power.

### **Early Crew**

Mr. H.A. Anderson and Mr. B.L. Kerfoot served as Chiefs during this period and the district consisted of 12 volunteers who were paid \$2.00 per fire response. An electric siren was mounted on the lumber company tower located on the corner of Main Street and North Avenue. This siren was used to call the volunteers into action.

### **Forest Service**

The stock market crash of 1929 was the beginning of the end of the Lemon Grove Volunteer Fire Department. Money was scarce and taxpayers were unable to meet their financial obligations. With no money to support the department it steadily decreased in size and service until 1930 – 1931. At this point the Forest Service took control of the equipment and again became responsible for fire protection in Lemon Grove.

### **Lemon Grove Fire Protection District**

The era of Forest Service fire protection lasted for 18 years before the people of Lemon Grove again saw the need for local fire protection. It was another three years before their hopes became a reality. On June 15, 1950 Lemon Grove voters approved the formation of the Lemon Grove Fire Protection District and a \$30,000 bond issue for the purchase of equipment. In January, 1951 Ray Carmody was hired as the first paid fireman followed by Charles M. Hamel and James Sanchez. H.L. "Pappy" Hensley was appointed Chief in December, 1951.

### **Growth**

The Fire Department grew steadily in size and efficiency. Fred Dixon succeeded Hensley as Fire Chief upon Hensley's retirement. In 1976 Robert Adams replaced Dixon as Fire Chief. In July of 1977 Lemon Grove incorporated as a City and in November of 1977 the Lemon Grove Fire District became the City of Lemon Grove Fire Department. A new fire station was started in 1986 and was completed in June of 1988 under the direction of Fire Chief Bill Wright. Wright was appointed to the Chief's position when Adams retired in 1987. Wright retired in 1996 and was succeeded by Dale Chamberlain who retired shortly before the City contracted for fire service from the San Miguel Consolidated Fire Protection District in 1997.

**Contracted**

With the hope that fire service to the City would be improved, fire service for the City was contracted to San Miguel Fire District in November of 1997. This relationship with San Miguel lasted until July of 2004. At that time fire service was returned to the City of Lemon Grove under the direction of Fire Chief Jon Torchia.